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NELLIE NETTERVILLE; OR, ONE OF THE TRANSPLANTED.

By the author of 'Wild Times' 'Brid Agassie,' etc.

CHAPTER I.

The stream which divides the county of Dublin from that of Meath runs part of its course through a pretty rock strewn, furze-blossoming valley, crowned at its western end by the ruins of a castle, which, in the days of Cromwell, belonged to one of the great families of the Pale—the English-Irish, as they were usually called, in order to distinguish them from the Celtic race, in whose land they had cast their fortunes.

A narrow winding path leads from the castle to the stream below, and down this there came, one cold January morning, in the year of the great Irish 'transplantation,' a young girl, wrapped in a hooded mantle of dark cloth, which, strong as it was, seemed barely sufficient to defend her from the heavy night fogs still rolling through the valley, banging on rock and bush and castle-turret in a fantastic drapery of clouds, and then falling back upon the earth in a mist as persistent, and quite as drenching, as an actual down-pour of rain could possibly have proved.

Following the course of the zigzag stream, as half hidden in furze and bramble, it made its way eastward to the sea, a short ten minutes' walk brought her to a low hut (it could hardly be called a house), built against a jutting rock, which formed in all probability the back wall of the tenement.—Here she paused, and after tapping lightly on the door, as a signal to its inmates, she turned, and throwing back the hood which had hitherto concealed her features, gazed sadly up and down the valley. In spite of the fog mists and the cold, the spot was indeed lovely enough in itself to deserve an admiring glance, even from one already familiar with its beauty; but in those dark eyes, heavy, as it seemed, with unshed tears, there was far less of admiration than of the longing, wistful gaze of one who felt she was looking her last upon a scene she loved, and was trying, therefore, to imprint upon her memory even the minutest of its features. For a moment she suffered her eyes to wander thus, from the clear, bright stream flowing rapidly at her feet to the double line of fantastic, irregularly-cut rocks which, crowned with patches of gorse and fern, shut out the valley from the world beyond as completely as if it had been meant to form a separate kingdom in itself; and then, at last, slowly, and as if by a strong and painful effort of the will, she glanced toward the spot where the castle stood, with its tall, square towers cut in sharp and strong relief against the gloomy background of the sky. A 'firm and fearless looking keep' it was—as the habitation of one who, come of an invading race, had to hold his own against all in-comers, had need to be—but while it rose boldly from a shoulder of out-jutting rock, like the guardian fortress of the den, the little village which nestled at its foot—the mill which turned merrily to the music of its bright stream, the smooth terrace and the dark woods immediately around it—the rich grazing lands, with their herds of cattle, which stretched far away as the eye could reach beyond—all seemed to indicate that its owner had been so long settled on the spot as to have learned at last to look upon it rather as his rightful inheritance than as a gift of conquest. Castled keep and merry mill, trees and cattle and cultivated fields, the girl seemed to take all in, in that long, mournful gaze which she cast upon them; but the thoughts and regrets which they forced upon her, growing in bitterness as she dwelt upon them, became at last too strong for calm endurance, and, throwing herself down upon her knees upon the cold, damp earth, she covered her face with both her hands, and burst into a passionate fit of weeping. Her sobs must have roused up the inmates of the hut; for almost immediately afterward the door was cautiously unclosed, and an ancient dame, with a large colored handkerchief covering her gray hairs, and tied under her chin, even as her descendants wear it to this hour, peeped out, with an evident resolve to see as much and be as little seen as possible in return, by the person who had, at that undue hour, disturbed her quiet slumbers. The moment, however, she discovered who it was that was weeping there, all thoughts of selfish fear seemed to vanish from her mind, and with a wild cry, in which love and grief and sympathy were mingled, as only an Irish cry can mix them, she flung her strong, bony arms around the girl, and exclaimed, in Irish, a language with which—we may as well, once for all, remark—the proud lords of the Pale were quite conversant, using it not only as a medium of communication with their Irish dependents, but by preference to English, in their familiar intercourse with each other, and for which reason, while we endeavor to give the old lady's conversation verbatim, as far as idiom and ideas

are concerned, we have ventured to omit all the mispronunciations and bad grammars, which, whether on the stage or in a novel, are rightly or wrongly considered to be the one thing needed toward the true delineation of the character, whatever the rank or education of the individual thus put on the scene may happen to be.

'O my darling, my darling,' cried the old woman, almost lifting the girl by main force from the ground; 'my heart's blood, a-cushla machree, what are you doing down there upon the damp grass, (sure it will be the death of you, it will,) with the morning fog wrapping round you like a curtain! Is there anything wrong up there at the castle? or what is it at all, at all, that brings you down here before the sun has had time to say 'Good-morrow' to the treetops?'

'O Grannie, Grannie!' sobbed the girl, 'have you not heard? do you not know already? It was to say good-by—I could not go without it, Grannie. I never shall see you again—perhaps never.'

Pity, and love, and sympathy, all beaming a moment before upon the face of the old hag, changed as instantaneously, as if by magic, into an expression of wild hatred, worthy the features of a conquered savage.

'It is true, then?' she cried; 'it is true what I heard last night! what I heard—but wouldst believe, Miss Nellie, if you were not here to the fore to say it to me yourself. It is true that they are for robbing the old master of his own; and that them murdering Cromwellians—my black curse on every mother's son of them—'

But before she could bring her denunciation to its conclusion, the girl had put her hand upon her mouth, and, with terror written on every feature of her face, exclaimed—

'Hush, Grannie, hush. For Christ and his sweet Mother's sake, keep quiet! Remember such words have cost many an honest man his life ere now, and God alone can tell who may or may not be within hearing at this moment.'

She caught the old woman by the arm as she spoke, dragging rather than leading her into the cottage. Once there, however, and with the door carefully closed behind her, she made no scruple of yielding to the anguish which old Grannie's lamentations had rather sharpened than allayed, and sitting down upon a low settle, suffered her tears to flow in silence. Grannie squatted herself down on the ground at her feet, and swaying her body backward and forward after the fashion of her people, broke out once more into vociferous lamentations over the fallen fortunes of her darling.

'O hone, ochone! that the young May morning of my darling's life (which ought to be as bright as God's dear skies above us) should be clouded over this way like a black November! Woe is me! woe is me! that I should have lived to see the day when the old stock is to be rooted out as if it was a worthless weed for the sake of a set of beggarly rascals, who have only come to Ireland, may be, because their own land (my heavy curse on it, for the heavy hand it has ever and always laid on us) wasn't big enough to hold their wickedness.'

It was in perfect unconsciousness and good faith that old Grannie thus spoke of Nellie and her family as of the old stock of the country—a favorite expression to this day among people of her class in Ireland.

The English descendants of Ireland's first invaders had, in fact, as years rolled by, and even while proudly asserting their own claims as Englishmen, so thoroughly identified themselves, both by intermarriages and the adoption of language, dress, and manners, with the Celtic natives of the soil, that the latter, ever ready, too ready, for their own interests perhaps, to be won by kindness, had ended by transferring to them the clanish feeling once given to their own rulers, and fought in the days we speak of under the standard of a De Burgh or a Fitzgerald as heartily and bitterly against Cromwell's soldiers as if an O'Neil or a MacMurrough had led them to the combat. To Nellie Netterville, therefore, the sympathy and indignation of old Grannie seemed quite as much a matter of course as if the blue blood coursing through her veins had been derived from a Celtic chieftain instead of from an old Norman baron of the days of King Henry. Nellie was, moreover, connected with the old woman by a tie which in those days was as strong, and even stronger than that of race; for the English of the Pale have adopted in its most comprehensive sense the Irish system of fosterage, and Grannie, having acted as foster-mother to Nellie's father, was to all intents and purposes, as devoted to the person of his daughter as if she had been in very deed a grandchild of her own.

But natural as such sympathy might have seemed, and soothing as no doubt it was to her wounded feelings, it was yet clothed in such dangerous language that it had an affect upon Nellie

the very opposite of that which under any other circumstances, it might have been expected to produce. It recalled her to the necessity of self-possession, and conscious that she must command her own feelings if she hoped to control those of her warm-hearted dependent, she deliberately wiped the tear from her eyes, and rose from the settle upon which she had flung herself, only a few minutes before, in an uncontrolled agony of grief. When she felt that she had thoroughly mastered her own emotion, she drew old Grannie toward her, made her sit down on the stool she herself had just vacated, and, kneeling down beside her, said in a tone of command which contrasted oddly, yet prettily enough with the child-like attitude assumed for the purpose of giving it:

'You must not say such things, Grannie. I forbid it. Now and for ever I forbid it! You must not say such things. They can neither help us nor save us sorrow, and they might cost your life, old woman, if any evil-designing person heard them.'

'My life, my life!' cried old Grannie passionately. 'And tell me, acushla, what is the value of my life to me, if all that made it pleasant to my heart is to be taken from me? Haven't I seen your father, whom I nursed at this breast until (God pardon me!) I loved him as well or better than them that were sent to me for my own portion?—haven't I seen him brought back here for a bloody burial in the very flower of his days? and didn't I lead the keening over him at the self-same moment that I knew my own poor boy was lying stiff and stark on the battle-field, where he had fallen (as well became him) in the defence of his own master? And now you come and tell me that you—you who are all that is left me in the wide world, you have been the very pulse of my heart ever since you were in the cradle—that you and the old lord are to be driven out of your own kingdom, and sent, God only knows where, into banishment—(him an old man of seventy, and you a slip of a girl that was only yesterday, so to speak, in your nurse's arms)—and you would have me keep quiet, would you? You'd have me belie the thought of my heart with a smiling face?—and all for the sake of a little longer life, forsooth! Troth, a-lannah, I have had a good taste of that same life already, and it's not so sweet I found it, that I would go as far as the river to fetch another sup of it. Not so sweet—not so sweet,' moaned the old woman, rocking herself backward and forward in time to the inflection of her voice—'not so sweet for the lone widow woman, with barely a roof above her head and not a chick or child (when you are out of it) for comfort or for coaxing!'

Grannie had poured forth this harangue with all the eloquent volubility of her Irish heart and tongue, and though Nellie had made more than one effort for the purpose, she had hitherto found it quite impossible to check her. Want of breath, however, silenced her at last, and then her foster-child took advantage of the lull in the storm to say:

'Dear old Grannie, do not talk so sadly. I will love and think of you every day, even in that far-off West to which we are exiled. And I forgot to say, moreover, that my dear mother is to remain here for some months longer, and will be ready (as she ever is) to give help and comfort to all that need it, and to you, of course, dear Grannie, more than to all the rest you whom she looks upon almost as the mother of her dead husband.'

'Ready to give help! Ay, that in troth she is,' quoth Grannie. 'God bless her for a sweet and gentle soul, that never did aught but what was good and kind to any one ever since she came among us, and that will be eighteen years come Christmas twelvemonth. Ochone! but them were merry times, a-lannah!—long before you were born or thought of. God pity you that you have burst into blossom in such weary days as these are.'

'Merry times? I suppose they were,' said Nellie good-naturedly, trying to lead poor Grannie's thoughts back to the good old times when she was young and happy. 'Tell me about it now, dear Grannie, (my mother's coming home, I mean,) that I may amuse myself by thinking it all over again, when I am far away in the lone West, and no good old Grannie to go and have a gossip with when I am tired of my own company.'

'Why, you see, Miss Nellie, and you mustn't be offended if I say it,' said Grannie eagerly, seizing on this new turn given to her ideas; 'we weren't too well pleased at first to hear that the young master was to be wedded in foreign parts, and some of us were even bold enough to ask if there weren't girls fair enough, ay, and good enough too, for that matter, for him in Ireland, that he must needs bring a Saxon to reign over us! However, when the old lord, up yonder at the castle, came down and told us how she had sent him word that for all she had the misfortune to be English born, she meant, once she

was married in Ireland, to be more Irish than the Irish themselves, then, I promise you, every vein in our hearts warmed toward her, and on the day of her coming home there wasn't, if you'll believe me, a man, woman, or child, within ten miles of Netterville, who didn't go out to meet her, until, what with the shouting and the hustling, she began to think, (the creature,) as she has often told me since, that it was going to massacre her, may be, that they were; for sure, until the day she first saw the young master, it was nothing but tales upon tales she had heard of how the wild Irish were worse than the savages themselves, and how murder and robbery were as common and as little thought of with us as laisies in the spring time. Any way, it she thought that for a moment, she didn't think it long; for when she faced round upon us at the castle gates, standing between her husband and her father in law, [the old lord himself] we gave her a cheer that might have been heard from this to Tredagh, if the wind had set that way; and though she didn't then understand the 'Cead mille-faithle' to your ladyship [that we were shouting in our Irish, she didn't think it long; for when she faced round upon us at the castle gates, standing between her husband and her father in law, [the old lord himself] we gave her a cheer that might have been heard from this to Tredagh, if the wind had set that way; and though she didn't then understand the 'Cead mille-faithle' to your ladyship [that we were shouting in our Irish, she didn't think it long; for when she faced round upon us at the castle gates, standing between her husband and her father in law, [the old lord himself] we gave her a cheer that might have been heard from this to Tredagh, if the wind had set that way; 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